

9 March 1955

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

Grave instability continues in Syria, but the possibility of an immediate coup has been temporarily diminished as a result of the growth of power of leftist elements backed by the army chief of staff.

These leftists are gaining new positions of strength in the army, which is the major factor in keeping the government of Prime Minister Asali in power. The extreme Arab Socialist-Resurrectionist Party already holds three key army positions, including that of head of personnel. It is also reliably reported scheduled to acquire control of intelligence. American army reports indicate that up to 40 percent of the younger officers are Arab Socialist adherents.

The Arab Socialists and Chief of Staff Shuqayr, along with the Communists, are opportunistically leagued behind Foreign Minister Khalid al Azm. They demonstrated their power recently when they forced parliament, by intimidation and a threat of military action, to give the Asali cabinet a vote of confidence.

Syrian conservatives feel capable of upsetting Asali by parliamentary means but fear that Shuqayr would swiftly retaliate by installing an even more leftist cabinet. The conservatives are not likely, however, to put up indefinitely with the current swing to the left.

These elements may be hurried into action by the efforts of Azm and Shuqayr, at Egyptian and Saudi Arabian bidding, to align Syria in a new and anti-Iraqi defense pact. Their alarm over Egyptian, Saudi and French intrigue in Syria against the Iraqi-

Turkish pact led them previously to ask Iraq, Britain, Turkey and the United States for assistance. They are now likely to renew this request. ~~(SECRET NOFORN)~~